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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 005001

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY: DERSIS HINTS AT CHALLENGING INEFFECTUAL  
BAYKAL FOR OPPOSITION CHP LEADERSHIP

REF: A. ANKARA 4862

[1](#)B. ANKARA 2048

(U) Classified by Acting Political Counselor Nicholas S.  
Kass. Reason: 1.5 (b)(d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: As opposition CHP struggles in public opinion polls, former State Minister/current CHP M.P. Kemal Dervis is beginning to push for a more visible role in the party, and to hint that he may eventually challenge Deniz Baykal for the party chairmanship. Surrounding himself largely with western-trained newcomers to politics, to CHP, and to Parliament, Dervis is trying to alter his party's stale, shopworn political image as rubber-stamp to an increasingly out-of-touch Establishment. Should Dervis try to follow through, he would face an uphill challenge. His success would depend on whether he can loosen Baykal's viselike grip on the CHP apparatus and Parliamentary group by: 1) demonstrating decisive political leadership and character -- which he may not in fact possess; and 2) overcoming his own elitist-statist political inclinations and abandoning his often uncritical public support for Kemalist equities -- something he has so far been loath to do. End summary.

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A Listless Opposition  
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[1](#)2. (C) Recent resignations of two M.P.s (ref A) -- and the possibility of more to come -- from main opposition CHP have brought forward barely concealed fissures within the party. According to a recent public opinion poll, support for CHP has dipped to 16 percent -- well below the support the party garnered in the Nov. 2002 national elections -- while support for the ruling AK Party has increased to around 40 percent.

[1](#)3. (C) Staunch Kemalists, for whom CHP is the only Establishment representative on the national political scene, are criticizing the party in harsh terms for Baykal's recklessness and, more importantly, his inability to inspire the faithful. Sina Aksin, a professor at Ankara University's prestigious Political Sciences Faculty, a bastion of Kemalist rectitude, charged to us that CHP has become a hollow shell of itself -- merely "the opium of the Kemalists." Columnists in Turkey's leading dailies are questioning the direction of CHP and, more directly, Baykal for an unprincipled and far-too-clever tactical approach to leadership. Erol Cevikce, a former Baykal confidant, described the CHP leader to poloff Aug. 5 as a very bright but shallow; foreigners meeting Baykal for the first time and unaware of his recent statements in Parliament "would no doubt think he is a brilliant man," Cevikce said. Baykal will do anything to win votes, including rail against the U.S. even though he has been a supporter of strong U.S.-Turkish relations. Explaining Baykal's Janus-faced leadership style, CHP deputy Damla Gurel told poloff recently that "when I hear what Baykal says in Parliament, I am disgusted and consider leaving CHP; when I travel with him abroad, I feel hopeful again."

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Dervis' Team  
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[1](#)4. (C) With Baykal's weaknesses and high negative ratings in the opinion polls, Kemal Dervis, formerly a state minister in the previous Ecevit-led government and now a CHP Istanbul Deputy, has been assiduously floating trial balloons to gauge CHP and public support for a change in leadership. His suggestion that he will seek a position on CHP's central committee at the party's general convention this fall has been widely interpreted as heralding a possible direct challenge to Baykal for the top spot.

15. (C) In private meetings with us, Dervis has said he wants transform CHP into a pro-reform, "European-style social democratic party" free of strong nationalist trappings -- in essence arguing that CHP's problem is not that it is straying away from Kemalism (the Aksin view), but that the Party of Ataturk is still too firmly welded to the dominant and more rigid form of the ideology. Dervis has also argued to us that CHP needs an infusion of youth to overcome the "1920s Kemalist mentality" -- the xenophobic statist-nationalism that, he says, pervades in the party administration (ref B). To this end, Dervis has gathered a coterie of like-minded M.P.s, including elements he personally recruited to the party prior to last November's elections and other self-professed social democrats. Among these are: Damla Gurel, who prior to joining CHP, had worked in Istanbul for the ARI Movement, a well-connected centrist NGO; Istanbul businessman and Harvard-trained economist Memduh Hacıoglu; Adana CHP deputy and outspoken feminist Gaye Erbatır; former Aegean University professor Necdet Budak, who studied at the Univ. of Nebraska; and Gulsun Bilgehan, granddaughter to İsmet İnönü. (Note: all of these deputies speak excellent English. End note.) These M.P.s work with Dervis, who heads CHP's "Science Platform" research arm, to analyze legislation independent of the party central committee and then present their views to the party.

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A Fight Too Tough for the Dervis Tekke?  
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16. (C) Dervis and his colleagues admit that they face an uphill battle in winning control of the party apparatus -- one non-Dervisite described the Science Platform to us as an organization "that produces reports no one reads" -- and developing a new CHP ethos. Dervis offered to us recently that changing CHP from within is a slow process and that he does not expect immediate results. "There is still some resistance from 'traditionalists,'" he noted. The resistance is also weighing heavily on Dervis disciples Gurel and Hacıoglu, both political newcomers. Gurel told poloff that, if she did not believe in what Dervis is doing, she would leave politics all together -- scant months after having joined CHP. Expressing his frustration with politics in general, Hacıoglu railed against "those circles who continue to resist reform: CHP leadership, the bureaucracy, and the army." "I wish I had never left my business," he said.

17. (C) Dervis et al tell us that in addition to outright opposition to intra-party reform, 'traditionalists' also often heap scorn on them for their supposed "Americanist" (Amerikancı) outlook. Before the failed March 1 vote in Parliament that would have authorized deployment of U.S. troops to Turkey in the run-up to the Iraq war, Dervis privately told poloff that he felt he could not speak openly in favor of strong U.S.-Turkish ties, because many in CHP "already consider me an American agent." More recently, Dervis claimed that the incident in Sulaymaniyah (involving the brief detention of Turkish troops by U.S. forces) had "made his life difficult" by strengthening the hand of the traditionalists. Similarly, Budak explained to us late July that he too has long been thought of as an Americanist, which, he said, is a double-edged sword at best. On the one hand, CHP deputies go to Budak when they have questions about the U.S. On the other, Budak said he is aware of "people whispering in the halls" against him, which in effect freezes him out of the party administration loop.

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The Character Issue  
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18. (C) The key problem confronting Dervis, however, is not his presumed Americanism but his own elitist-statist inclination. This, while more sophisticated than the run-of-the-mill, rigid tendency exhibited by the party cadres, does not sit well with the growing majority of voters eager for change. Dervis has also exhibited a lack of both political acumen and the courage of his ostensibly non-traditionalist convictions. This might be even more problematic for him, given that the principal indictments against Baykal are based on exactly the same character flaws. Before the 2002 elections, Dervis encouraged rebellion within then P.M. Ecevit's center-left DSP, but left his erstwhile colleagues twisting in the wind as he sought safe harbor in CHP. He also publicly proclaimed his support for the Kemalist status quo as embodied by the National Security Council (NSC) -- a move, widely perceived to be an effort to pander to Turkey's powerful generals in the run-up to the polls, that infuriated the reformist intellectuals who had supported his rise to prominence and covered for him in their

columns. More recently, Dervis has privately praised AK's NSC-related and other reform efforts, while expressing to us only the mildest of reservations about AK's ultimate goals. To journalists, however, Dervis is promoting the specter of AK as an "Islamic threat" to Turkey -- although as "Hurriyet" columnist Cuneyt Ulsever offered to us recently, Dervis "knows better." While Dervis may be making such statements to cover his political flanks, the impression he leaves is that of a man without a political compass.

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Kemal the Apostate?  
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19. (C) Dervis is now looking to CHP's convention this fall, where he hopes to see changes to the party administration. Beyond that looms next April's local elections, which many in CHP view as a referendum on Baykal's leadership. It is an open question whether Dervis can, or in the final analysis is inclined to, resist the strong pull of the Turkish Establishment "traditions" that he privately assails, and thus to avoid becoming just another in a long line of unsuccessful political wannabes. Moreover, Dervis is still seen as a technocrat unwilling to sully his hands in the dirty game of Turkish retail politics. There is, in fact, an unmistakable aura surrounding Dervis of elite technocratic disapproval of Anatolian realities -- a quintessential CHP characteristic that hurt the party badly in the 2002 elections and helps explain its current dithering and ineffectiveness. In short, to succeed Dervis has to demonstrate that he is neither Baykal nor a staunch Kemalist, which given his present circumstances and disposition would be tantamount to apostasy.

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